

Navy Lasers, Railgun, and Hypervelocity Projectile: Background and Issues for Congress

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March 18, 2016

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

R44175

Summary

The Navy is currently developing three potential new weapons that could improve the ability of its surface ships to defend themselves against enemy missiles—solid state lasers (SSLs), the electromagnetic railgun (EMRG), and the hypervelocity projectile (HVP).

Any one of these new weapon technologies, if successfully developed and deployed, might be regarded as a “game changer” for defending Navy surface ships against enemy missiles. If two or three of them are successfully developed and deployed, the result might be considered not just a game changer, but a revolution. Rarely has the Navy had so many potential new types of surface-ship missile-defense weapons simultaneously available for development and potential deployment.

Although the Navy in recent years has made considerable progress in developing SSLs, EMRG, and HVP, a number of significant development challenges remain. Overcoming these challenges will likely require years of additional development work, and ultimate success in overcoming them is not guaranteed.

The issue for Congress is whether to approve, reject, or modify the Navy’s funding requests and proposed acquisition strategies for these three potential new weapons. Potential oversight questions for Congress include the following:

- Using currently available approaches for countering anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) and anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs), how well could Navy surface ships defend themselves in a combat scenario against an adversary such as China that has large numbers of ASCMs (including advanced models) and ASBMs? How would this change if Navy surface ships in coming years were equipped with SSLs, EMRG, HVP, or some combination of these systems?
- How significant are the remaining development challenges for SSLs, EMRG, and HVP?
- Are current schedules for developing SSLs, EMRG, and HVP appropriate in relation to remaining development challenges and projected improvements in enemy ASCMs and ASBMs? To what degree are current schedules for developing SSLs, EMRG, or HVP sensitive to annual funding levels?
- When does the Navy anticipate issuing roadmaps detailing its plans for procuring and installing production versions of SSLs, EMRGs, and HVP on specific Navy ships by specific dates?
- Will the kinds of surface ships that the Navy plans to procure in coming years have sufficient space, weight, electrical power, and cooling capability to take full advantage of SSLs (particularly those with beam powers above 200 kW) and EMRG? What changes, if any, would need to be made in Navy plans for procuring large surface combatants (i.e., destroyers and cruisers) or other Navy ships to take full advantage of SSLs and EMRG?
- Are the funding sources for SSLs, EMRG, and HVP in Navy and Defense-Wide research and development accounts sufficiently visible for supporting congressional oversight?

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Introduction

Issue for Congress

This report provides background information and issues for Congress on three potential new weapons that could improve the ability of Navy surface ships to defend themselves against enemy missiles—solid state lasers (SSLs), the electromagnetic railgun (EMRG), and the hypervelocity projectile (HVP).¹

Any one of these new weapon technologies, if successfully developed and deployed, might be regarded as a “game changer” for defending Navy surface ships against enemy missiles. If two or three of them are successfully developed and deployed, the result might be considered not just a game changer, but a revolution. Rarely has the Navy had so many potential new types of surface-ship missile-defense weapons simultaneously available for development and potential deployment. Although the Navy in recent years has made considerable progress in developing SSLs, EMRG, and HVP, a number of significant development challenges remain.

The issue for Congress is whether to approve, reject, or modify the Navy’s funding requests and proposed acquisition strategies for these three potential new weapons. Congress’ decisions on this issue could affect future Navy capabilities and funding requirements and the defense industrial base.

Scope of Report

SSLs are being developed by multiple parts of the Department of Defense (DOD), not just the Navy. SSLs, EMRG, and HVP, moreover, have potential application to military aircraft and ground forces equipment, not just surface ships. And SSLs, EMRG, and HVP can be used for missions other than defending against ASCMs and ASBMs.² This report focuses on Navy efforts to develop SSLs, EMRG, and HVP for potential use in defending Navy surface ships against ASCMs and ASBMs. It supersedes an earlier CRS report that provided an introduction to potential Navy shipboard lasers.³

Note that while fictional depictions of laser weapons in popular media often show them being used to attack targets at long ranges, the SSLs currently being developed by the Navy for potential shipboard use would be used to counter targets at short ranges of about a mile to perhaps a few miles.

¹ Railgun is also spelled as rail gun; EMRG is also abbreviated as EM railgun; hypervelocity is also spelled as hyper-velocity or hyper velocity.

² As discussed later in the report, the Navy is exploring the potential for using shipboard lasers to counter small boats and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and EMRG can be used to attack land targets.

³ CRS Report R41526, *Navy Shipboard Lasers for Surface, Air, and Missile Defense: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke. This earlier CRS report has been archived and remains available as a supplementary reference source on potential Navy shipboard lasers.

Background

Strategic and Budgetary Context

Concern about Survivability of Navy Surface Ships

Although Navy surface ships have a number of means for defending themselves against anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) and anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs),⁴ some observers are concerned about the survivability of Navy surface ships in potential combat situations against adversaries, such as China, that are armed with advanced ASCMs and with ASBMs.⁵ Concern about this issue has led some observers to conclude that the Navy's surface fleet in coming years might need to avoid operating in waters that are within range of these weapons, or that the Navy might need to move toward a different fleet architecture that relies less on larger surface ships and more on smaller surface ships and submarines.⁶ Such changes in Navy operating areas and fleet architecture could substantially affect U.S. military strategy and the composition of the Navy's shipbuilding expenditures.

Navy surface fleet leaders in early 2015 announced a new organizing concept for the Navy's surface fleet called distributed lethality. Under distributed lethality, offensive weapons such as ASCMs are to be distributed more widely across all types of Navy surface ships, and new operational concepts for Navy surface ship formations are to be implemented. The aim of distributed lethality is to boost the surface fleet's capability for attacking enemy ships and make it less possible for an enemy to cripple the U.S. fleet by concentrating its attacks on a few very-high-value Navy surface ships (particularly the Navy's aircraft carriers).⁷ Perspectives on whether

⁴ These include the following: operating ships in ways that make it hard for others to detect and accurately track Navy ships; jamming or destroying enemy targeting sensors; interfering with the transmission of targeting data from sensors to weapon launchers; attacking weapon launchers (which can land-based launchers or launchers on surface ships, submarines, or aircraft); and countering ASCMs and ASBMs headed toward Navy ships. Navy measures for countering ASCMs and ASBMs headed toward Navy ships include the following: jamming a missile's guidance system; using decoys of various kinds to lure enemy missiles away from Navy ships; and shooting down enemy missiles with surface-to-air missiles and the Phalanx Close-In Weapon System (CIWS), which is essentially a radar-controlled Gatling gun. Employing all these measures reflects a long-standing Navy approach of creating a multi-layered defense against enemy missiles, and of attacking the enemy's "kill chain" at multiple points so as to increase the chances of breaking the chain. (The kill chain is the sequence of steps that an enemy must complete to conduct a successful missile attack on a Navy ship. This sequence includes, at a basic level of description, detecting and tracking the Navy ship, passing that information from sensors to the weapon launcher, launching the weapon, and guiding the weapon all the way to the Navy ship. Interfering with any one of these actions can break the kill chain and thereby prevent or defeat the attack.)

⁵ See, for example, Andrew F. Krepinevich, *Maritime Warfare in a Mature Precision-Strike Regime*, Washington, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2014, 128 pp. For more on China's ASCMs and ASBMs, see CRS Report RL33153, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

ASCMs and ASBMs are not the only reasons that some observers are concerned about the future survivability of U.S. Navy surface ships in combat situations; observers are also concerned about threats to U.S. Navy surface ships posed by small boats, mines, and torpedoes.

⁶ See, for example, Phillip E. Pournelle, "The Deadly Future of Sea Control," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, July 2015: 26-31.

⁷ See, for example, Thomas Rowden, Peter Gumataotao, and Peter Fanta, "Distributed Lethality," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, January 2015: 18-23; Sam LaGrone, "SNA: Navy Surface Leaders Pitch More Lethal Ships, Surface Action Groups," *USNI News*, January 14, 2015; Kris Osborn, "Navy Unveils New Surface Warfare Strategy," *Military.com*, January 14, 2015; Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "'If It Floats, It Fights': Navy Seeks 'Distributed Lethality,'" *Breaking Defense*, January 14, 2015; Mike McCarthy and Megan Eckstein, "Navy Eyeing A 'Hunter Killer' Surface (continued...)"

it would be cost effective to spend money spreading offensive weapons across a wider array of Navy surface ships might be influenced by views on whether those surface ships can adequately defend themselves against enemy missiles.

Depth of Magazine and Cost Exchange Ratio

Two key limitations that Navy surface ships currently have in defending themselves against ASCMs and ASBMs are limited depth of magazine and unfavorable cost exchange ratios. Limited depth of magazine refers to the fact that Navy surface ships can use surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and their Close-in Weapon System (CIWS) Gatling guns to shoot down only a certain number of enemy unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and anti-ship missiles before running out of SAMs and CIWS ammunition⁸—a situation (sometimes called “going Winchester”), that can require a ship to withdraw from battle, spend time travelling to a safe reloading location (which can be hundreds of miles away),⁹ and then spend more time traveling back to the battle area.

Unfavorable cost exchange ratios refer to the fact that a SAM used to shoot down a UAV or anti-ship missile can cost the Navy more (perhaps much more) to procure than it cost the adversary to build or acquire the UAV or anti-ship missile. In the FY2016 defense budget, procurement costs for Navy SAMs range from about \$900,000 per missile to several million dollars per missile, depending on the type.¹⁰

In combat scenarios against an adversary with a limited number of UAVs and anti-ship missiles, an unfavorable cost exchange ratio can be acceptable because it saves the lives of Navy sailors and prevents very expensive damage to Navy ships. But in combat scenarios (or an ongoing military capabilities competition) against a country such as China that has many UAVs and anti-ship missiles and a capacity for building or acquiring many more, an unfavorable cost exchange ratio can become a very expensive—and potentially unaffordable—approach to defending Navy surface ships against UAVs and anti-ship missiles, particularly in a context of constraints on U.S. defense spending and competing demands for finite U.S. defense funds.

(...continued)

Fleet, Would Require Upgunning Existing Ship Fleets,” *Defense Daily*, January 15, 2015: 1-3; Richard Scott, “Offensive Language: USN Sets Out Surface Firepower Strategy,” *Jane’s International Defence Review*, May 2015: 42-47; Megan Eckstein, “Navy Studying Implications of Distributed Lethality in Wargames Series,” *USNI News*, July 9, 2015; Lara Seligman, “Navy Establishes Task Force To Study Impact of Distributed lethality,” *Inside the Navy*, July 10, 2015.

⁸ Navy cruisers have 122 missile cells; Navy destroyers have 90 or 96 missile cells. Some of these cells are used for storing and launching Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles or anti-submarine rockets. The remainder are available for storing and launching SAMs. A Navy cruiser or destroyer might thus be armed with a few dozen or several dozen SAMs for countering ASCMs and ASBMs. Countering ASCMs or ASBMs with SAMs might sometimes require shooting two SAMs at each ASCM or ASBM.

⁹ The missile cells on a Navy cruiser or destroyers are clustered together in an installation called a Vertical Launch System (VLS). VLS cells cannot be reloaded while the ship is underway; a ship needs to return to a port or a calm anchorage to reload its VLS.

¹⁰ Unit procurement costs for ship-launched SAMs in the FY2016 are as follows: about \$900,000 for the Rolling Airframe Missile (RAM), about \$1.1 million to about \$1.5 million for the Evolved Sea Sparrow Missile (ESSM), about \$3.9 million for the SM-6 Block 1 missile, about \$14 million for the SM-3 Block 1B missile, and more than \$20 million for the SM-3 Block IIA missiles. RAM and ESSM are short-range missiles for defense against aircraft and ASCMs. The SM-6 Block 1 is a medium-range missile used for both defense against aircraft and ASCMs, and terminal (i.e., endo-atmospheric) defense against theater-range ballistic missiles. The SM-3 Block 1B and SM-3 Block IIA are used for mid-course (i.e., exo-atmospheric) defense against theater-range ballistic missiles.

SSLs, EMRG, and HVP offer a potential for dramatically improving depth of magazine and the cost exchange ratio:

- **Depth of magazine.** SSLs are electrically powered, drawing their power from the ship's overall electrical supply, and can be fired over and over, indefinitely, as long as the SSL continues to work and the ship has fuel to generate electricity. The EMRG's projectile and the HVP (which are one and the same—see next section) can be stored by the hundreds in a Navy surface ship's weapon magazine.¹¹
- **Cost exchange ratio.** An SSL can be fired for a marginal cost of less than one dollar per shot (which is the cost of the fuel needed to generate the electricity used in the shot), while the EMRG's projectile/HVP has an estimated unit procurement cost of about \$25,000.¹²

For additional discussion of the strategic and budgetary context in which the programs discussed in this report and other Navy programs may be considered, see CRS Report RL32665, *Navy Force Structure and Shipbuilding Plans: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

SSLs, EMRG, and HVP in Brief

SSLs

Overview

The Navy in recent years has leveraged both significant advancements in industrial SSLs and decades of research and development work on military lasers done by other parts of DOD to make substantial progress toward deploying high-energy SSLs¹³ on Navy surface ships. Navy surface ships would use high-energy SSLs initially for countering small boats UAVs, and potentially in the future for countering ASCMs and ASBMs as well.¹⁴ High-energy SSLs on Navy ships would be short-range defensive weapons—they would counter targets at ranges of about one mile to perhaps eventually a few miles.¹⁵

¹¹ In July 2015, the Navy issued a request for information (RFI) to industry for the fabrication of a prototype EMRG mount that would store a minimum of 650 rounds. (RFI for Fabrication of Prototype Mount for Naval Railgun, Solicitation Number: N00024-15-R-4132, FedBizOpps.gov, July 29, 2015. See also Justin Doubleday, "Navy Developing Integrated Mount For Electromagnetic Railgun," *Inside the Navy*, July 31, 2015.)

¹² Sources for cost of HVP: David Martin, "Navy's Newest Weapon Kills at Seven Times the Speed of Sound," CBS News (cbssnews.com), April 7, 2014; Kris Osborn, "Navy Will Test its Electromagnetic Rail Gun aboard DDG 1000," *DefenseTech*, April 15, 2015.

¹³ In discussions of potential Navy shipboard lasers, a high-energy laser is generally considered to be a laser with a beam power of at least 10 kilowatts (kW).

¹⁴ In general, lasers would counter small boats and missiles by heating and burning holes in their skins, and causing thermal damage to their interiors. Lasers can also be used to "dazzle" (i.e., interfere with) electro-optical sensors on a boat or missile.

¹⁵ The Navy has also performed research and development work on a different kind of laser, called the free electron laser (FEL). In recent years, Navy research and development work on potential shipboard lasers has shifted more to SSLs. For background information on the FEL, see CRS Report R41526, *Navy Shipboard Lasers for Surface, Air, and Missile Defense: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

In addition to a low marginal cost per shot and deep magazine, potential advantages of shipboard lasers include fast engagement times, an ability to counter radically maneuvering missiles, an ability to conduct precision engagements, and an ability to use lasers for graduated responses ranging from detecting and monitoring targets to causing disabling damage. Potential limitations of shipboard lasers relate to line of sight; atmospheric absorption, scattering, and turbulence (which prevent shipboard lasers from being all-weather weapons); an effect known as thermal blooming that can reduce laser effectiveness; countering saturation attacks; possible adversary use of hardened targets and countermeasures; and risk of collateral damage, including damage to aircraft and satellites and permanent damage to human eyesight, including blinding. These potential advantages and limitations are discussed in greater detail in the **Appendix**.

Selected Key Developments

Key developments in the Navy's high-energy SSL development effort include the following:

- Between 2009 and 2012, the Navy successfully tested a prototype SSL called the Laser Weapon System (LaWS) against UAVs in a series of engagements that took place initially on land and subsequently on a Navy ship at sea.
- Between 2010 and 2011, the Navy tested another prototype SSL called the Maritime Laser Demonstration (MLD) in a series of tests that culminated with an MLD installed on a Navy ship successfully engaging a small boat.
- In April 2013, the Navy announced that it planned to install LaWS on the USS *Ponce* (pronounced pon-SAY)—a converted amphibious ship that is operating in the Persian Gulf as an interim Afloat Forward Staging Base (AFSB[I])¹⁶—to conduct evaluation of shipboard lasers in an operational setting against swarming boats and swarming UAVs.¹⁷ The system was installed in August 2014 (see **Figure 1**, **Figure 2**, and **Figure 3**).
- In March 2014, it was reported that the Navy anticipated moving to a shipboard laser program of record in “the FY2018 time frame” and achieving an initial operational capability (IOC) with a shipboard laser in FY2020 or FY2021.¹⁸

¹⁶ An AFSB operates as a “mother ship” for Navy helicopter and small boat operations. The *Ponce* is serving as an interim AFSB pending the arrival of a new AFSB that is currently being built.

¹⁷ “Navy Leaders Announce Plans for Deploying Cost-Saving Laser Technology,” *Navy News Service*, April 8, 2013; Thom Shanker, “Navy Deploying Laser Weapon Prototype Near Iran,” *New York Times*, April 9, 2013: 4; Mike McCarthy, “Navy Deploying Laser For Taking Out Drones,” *Defense Daily*, April 9, 2013; Graham Warwick, “U.S. Navy Planning Gulf Deployment For Laser Weapon,” *Aerospace Daily & Defense Report*, April 9, 2013: 6; Megan Eckstein, “Navy-Built Laser Weapon System Will Begin Demo On Ponce In Early 2014,” *Inside the Navy*, April 15, 2013. See also Lara Seligman, “Navy-built LaWS To Begin Demo This Summer, IOC Slated For FY-20-21,” *Inside the Navy*, March 24, 2014; Office of Naval Research, “All Systems Go: Navy’s Laser Weapon Ready for Summer Deployment,” *Navy News Service*, April 7, 2014.

Swarming refers to the use of boats and UAVs in large numbers, or swarms, in an attempt to confuse and overwhelm a target ship’s defensive systems.

¹⁸ Lara Seligman, “Navy-built LaWS To Begin Demo This Summer, IOC Slated For FY-20-21,” *Inside the Navy*, March 24, 2014. A program of record, or POR, is a term sometimes used by DOD officials that means, in general, a program in the Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP) that is intended to provide a new, improved, or continuing materiel, weapon, or information system or service capability in response to an approved need. The term is sometimes used to refer to a program in a service’s budget for procuring and deploying an operational weapon system, as opposed to a research and development effort that might or might not eventually lead to procurement and deployment of an operational weapon system.

- In December 2014, the Navy declared LaWS on the Ponce to be an “operational” system.¹⁹

Figure 1. Laser Weapon System (LaWS) on USS Ponce



Source: Navy photograph dated November 16, 2014, accompanying David Smalley, “Historic Leap: Navy Shipboard Laser Operates in Arabian Gulf,” *Navy News Service*, December 10, 2014, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/list_all.asp?id=84805.

¹⁹ A December, 11, 2014, press report stated

The Navy’s first-of-a-kind laser deployed on a vessel sailing in the Persian Gulf has been declared operational and can be used by the crew to defend itself against potential threats, the service’s head of the Office of Naval Research said on Wednesday [December 10, 2014].

Rear Adm. Matthew Klunder told reporters on a conference call that Central Command has been green lighted to use the laser in the event of a threat, approval that has been passed along to the ship’s commanding officer. The 30-kilowatt laser, known as the Laser Weapon System, or LaWS, was installed on the USS Ponce in August [2014].

The ship later departed for the Persian Gulf and the LaWS successfully carried out operational testing recently by striking a fast attack boat and drone, Klunder said, adding that this marks the “historic” first ever operational deployment of a directed energy weapon.

(Mike McCarthy, “Navy Authorized To Use Ship-Based Laser In Battle,” *Defense Daily*, December 11, 2014: 3. See also Sam LaGrone, “U.S. Navy Allowed to Use Persian Gulf Laser for Defense,” *USNI News*, December 10, 2014; Philip Ewing, “Navy Declares Laser Weapon ‘Operational,’” *Politico Pro (Pro Defense Report)*, December 10, 2014.)

The Navy testified on February 24, 2016, that

the Solid State Laser Quick Reaction Capability (SSL-QRC) was fielded as a science and technology demonstration aboard the USS PONCE. It was successfully demonstrated as an effective weapon system and was subsequently transitioned to the fleet in the Central Command area of responsibility and is now an operational system.

(Statement of Rear Admiral Mathias W. Winter, United States Navy, Chief of Naval Research, Before the Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on The Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Request, February 24, 2016, p. 15.)

Figure 2. Laser Weapon System (LaWS) on USS Ponce



Source: Navy photograph dated November 17, 2014, accompanying David Smalley, "Historic Leap: Navy Shipboard Laser Operates in Arabian Gulf," *Navy News Service*, December 10, 2014, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/list_all.asp?id=84805.

Figure 3. Laser Weapon System (LaWS) on USS Ponce



Source: Navy photograph dated November 16, 2014, accompanying David Smalley, “Historic Leap: Navy Shipboard Laser Operates in Arabian Gulf,” *Navy News Service*, December 10, 2014, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/list_all.asp?id=84805.

SSL Technology Maturation (SSL-TM) Program

LaWS has a reported beam power of 30 kilowatts (kW),²⁰ which is strong enough to counter small boats and UAVs. As a follow-on effort to LaWS and MLD, the Navy initiated the SSL Technology Maturation (SSL-TM) program, in which industry teams led by BAE Systems, Northrop Grumman, and Raytheon, among others, competed to develop a shipboard laser with a beam power of 100 kW to 150 kW, which would provide increased effectiveness against small

²⁰ See, for example, Mike McCarthy, “Navy Authorized To Use Ship-Based Laser In Battle,” *Defense Daily*, December 11, 2014: 3.

boats and UAVs.²¹ Boosting beam power further—to something like 200 kW or 300 kW—could permit a laser to counter at least some ASCMs. Even stronger beam powers—on the order of at least several hundred kW, if not one megawatt (MW) or more—could improve a laser’s effectiveness against ASCMs and enable it to counter ASBMs.²²

On October 22, 2015, DOD announced that it had selected Northrop Grumman as the winner of the SSL-TM competition. DOD’s contract-award announcement stated:

Northrop Grumman Space and Mission Systems Corp., Redondo Beach, California, is being awarded a \$53,151,809 cost-plus-fixed-fee contract for the Solid State High Power Laser Weapon System Demonstrator (LWSD) program.... The Office of Naval Research seeks to continue the advancement of SSL weapon system designs, architectures, and component technologies. The government believes that improvements in lethality may be achieved through maturation and optimization of a variety of system characteristics, including laser power, beam quality, beam director architecture, and other physical and optical aspects of the laser, beam director, and system design. Leveraging our experience and internal investments, the Northrop Grumman team is ready to fully support the three phases of the LWSD program. This contract contains options, which if exercised, will bring the contract value to \$91,057,597. Work will be performed in Redondo Beach, California, and is expected to be completed Oct. 21, 2016. If options are exercised, work will continue through July 7, 2018.... This contract was competitively procured under the Office of Naval Research broad agency announcement 15-0005 entitled “Solid State, High Power Laser Weapon System Demonstrator (LWSD) Design, Development and Demonstration for Surface Navy, USN.” Six proposals were received in response to this solicitation.²³

A December 22, 2016, Northrop Grumman news release about the October 22, 2016, contract award stated:

During Phase 1 of the LWSD contract, Northrop Grumman will develop a detailed design for the new system. Phase 2 will include assembly and ground test of the system, while Phase 3 will comprise at-sea testing of the system aboard the Navy’s Self Defense Test Ship (SDTS). The Navy will lead this testing with Northrop Grumman providing technical support. The SDTS is the former USS Paul F. Foster (DD-964).

According to Renard, Northrop Grumman’s LWSD is well suited to support the Navy’s planned initial testing on the SDTS. The company has designed its system to be installed, however, with minimal modification or additional costs, for demonstration on the Navy’s DDG-51 FLT II class destroyers.²⁴

²¹ For more on the SSL-TM program, see Office of Naval Research, “Solid-State Laser Technology Maturation Program,” accessed August 11, 2015, at <http://www.onr.navy.mil/Media-Center/Fact-Sheets/Solid-State-Laser-Technology-Maturation-Program.aspx>; Office of Naval Research, “Solid State Laser Technology Maturation Program,” September 2012, accessed August 11, 2015, at <http://www.onr.navy.mil/~media/Files/Fact-Sheets/35/Solid-State-Laser-Technology-Maturation-Program-2012-a.ashx>; Office of Naval Research, “Research and Development/Technology Maturation of Solid State High Power Laser Weapon Systems, Subsystems, and/or Components for Surface Navy, USN, Broad Agency Announcement (BAA),” ONR BAA # 12-019, 2012, accessed August 11, 2015, at <http://www.onr.navy.mil/~media/files/funding-announcements/baa/2012/12-019.ashx>; Future Force, “Developing a High-Energy Laser for the Navy,” January 23, 2015, accessed August 11, 2015, at <http://futureforce.navylive.dodlive.mil/2015/01/high-energy-laser/>.

²² For additional discussion, see CRS Report R41526, *Navy Shipboard Lasers for Surface, Air, and Missile Defense: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O’Rourke, particularly the section entitled “Required Laser Power Levels for Countering Targets” and Appendix A on “Laser Power Levels Required to Counter Targets.”

²³ DOD contract award announcements for October 22, 2015, accessed December 18, 2015, at: <http://www.defense.gov/News/Contracts/Contract-View/Article/625630>.

²⁴ “US Navy Selects Northrop Grumman to Design and Produce Shipboard Laser Weapon System Demonstrator,” (continued...)

Figure 4 shows an artist's rendering of LWSD installed on the Navy's Self Defense Test Ship (the USS Paul F. Foster [DD-964], an old Spruance [DD-963] class destroyer).

Figure 4. Laser Weapon System Demonstrator (LWSD) on Self Defense Test Ship

Artist's rendering



Source: Cropped version of image accessed on March 18, 2016, at <http://media.globenewswire.com/cache/189/hires/39412.jpg>.

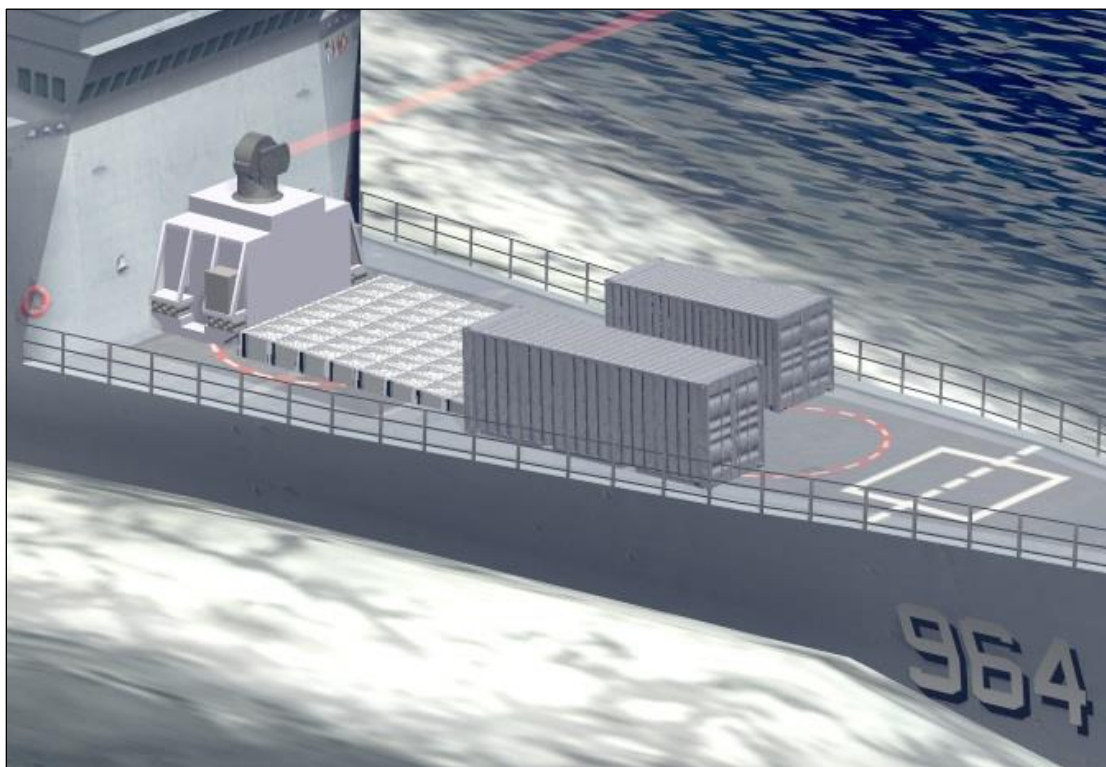
Figure 5 is a detail from the above photo.

(...continued)

December 22, 2016, accessed March 18, 2016, at:

http://www.globenewswire.com/newsarchive/noc/press/pages/news_releases.html?d=10158731 .

Figure 5. Laser Weapon System Demonstrator (LWSD) on Self Defense Test Ship
Artist's rendering

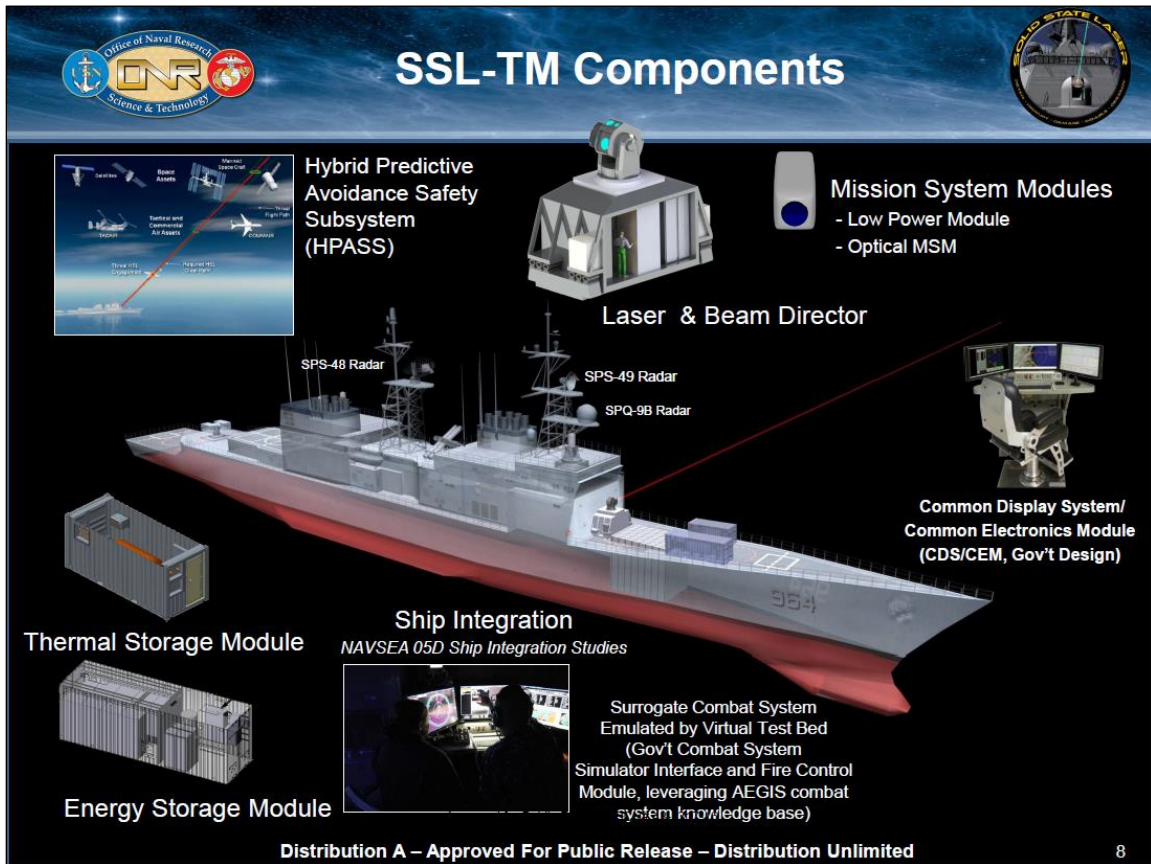


Source: Cropped version of image accessed on March 18, 2016, at <http://media.globenewswire.com/cache/189/hires/39412.jpg>.

Figure 6 Is an Office of Naval Research (ONR) graphic illustration of the LWSD's major components.

Figure 6. ONR Graphic of LWSD Components

Artist's rendering



Source: Slide from February 2016 ONR briefing to CRS on SSL-TM program, received from Navy Office of Legislative Affairs February 26, 2016.

Directed Energy Roadmap

A July 28, 2015, press report stated:

[Secretary of the Navy Ray] Mabus said he would release a DE [directed energy]²⁵ roadmap this fall that “charts our course for research, development, and fielding of high power radio frequency weapons, lasers, and directed energy countermeasures. And I will follow it up with my guidance to the Program Objective Memorandum for [Fiscal Year 2018],²⁶ which, importantly, establishes a resource sponsor and a program of record.”...

Also meant to help quicken the pace of progress, the Office of Naval Research will take lessons learned from the [USS] Ponce to inform the Solid State Laser Technology Maturation program that aims to produce a 100-150 kilowatt laser prototype for at-sea testing in 2018, or sooner if possible. Rear Adm. Bryant Fuller, Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) chief engineer, said... that everything the Navy learned about rules

²⁵ Lasers and another class of weapons called high-power microwave (HPM) weapons are referred to collectively as directed-energy weapons because they achieve their effects by directing electromagnetic energy at their targets.

²⁶ The Program Objective Memorandum (POM) is an internal DOD document that guides the preparation of a budget for a particular fiscal year.

of engagement and how to use LaWS in an operational environment would apply to larger laser weapons as well. Leveraging the operational knowledge Ponce gained will help the Navy field whatever comes out of the SSL-TM effort much more rapidly.

In the meantime, Mabus said the Laser Weapon System (LaWS) will continue its work in the Middle East after early success led officials to extend its deployment.²⁷

EMRG

In addition to SSLs, the Navy since 2005 has been developing EMRG, a cannon that uses electricity rather than chemical propellants (i.e., gunpowder charges) to fire a projectile.²⁸ In EMRG, “magnetic fields created by high electrical currents accelerate a sliding metal conductor, or armature, between two rails to launch projectiles at [speeds of] 4,500 mph to 5,600 mph,”²⁹ or roughly Mach 5.9 to Mach 7.4 at sea level.³⁰ Like SSLs, EMRG draws its power from the ship’s overall electrical supply.³¹ The Navy originally began developing EMRG as a naval surface fire support (NSFS) weapon for supporting U.S. Marines operating ashore, but subsequently determined that the weapon also has potential for defending against ASCMs and ASBMs.³² In response to Section 243 of the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1540/P.L. 112-81 of December 31, 2011), the Navy in September 2012 submitted to the congressional defense committees a report on the EMRG development effort.³³

Following tests with early Navy-built EMRG prototypes, the Navy funded the development of two industry-built EMRG prototype demonstrators, one by BAE Systems and the other by General Atomics (see **Figure 7** and **Figure 8**).

²⁷ Megan Eckstein, “Mabus: Adversaries Showing Interest in Directed Energy; Navy Needs to Move Faster,” *USNI News*, July 28, 2015.

²⁸ Because it uses electricity rather than a powder charge to accelerate the projectile, Navy officials sometimes refer to EMRG as a launcher rather than a gun or cannon.

²⁹ Grace Jean, “With a Bang, Navy Begins Tests on EM Railgun Prototype Launcher,” Navy News Service, February 28, 2012, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=65577.

³⁰ The speed of sound in air (i.e., Mach 1), varies with altitude; at sea level, it is approximately 761 miles an hour. (See for example, the table entitled “Speed of Sound at Different Altitudes,” accessed August 12, 2015, at <http://www.fighter-planes.com/jetmach1.htm>.)

³¹ Unlike SSLs, however, EMRG is not a directed energy weapon, because it achieves its effects by firing a physical projectile at the target, not by directing electromagnetic energy at the target. See also footnote 25.

³² For a recent article discussing the use of EMRG in countering ASCMs and ASBMs, see Sam LaGrone, “Navy Wants Rail Guns to Fight Ballistic and Supersonic Missiles Says RFI,” *USNI News*, January 5, 2015.

³³ U.S. Navy, *Electromagnetic Railgun System: Final Report to the Congressional Defense Committees*, August 2012, with cover letters dated September 18, 2012. For a press report discussing the Navy’s report to Congress, see Dan Taylor, “Stackley: Navy Identifies Four Technical Hurdles To Railgun Development,” *Inside the Navy*, November 19, 2012.

Figure 7. Industry-Built EMRG Prototype Demonstrator
BAE prototype



Source: Navy photograph dated July 8, 2014, associated with Office of Naval Research Public Affairs, "From Research to Railgun: Revolutionary Weapon at Future Force EXPO," *Navy News Service*, January 13, 2015, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=85166.

Figure 8. Industry-Built EMRG Prototype Demonstrator
General Atomics prototype



Source: navy photograph dated July 8, 2014, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=180994.

The two industry-built prototypes are designed to fire projectiles at energy levels of 20 to 32 megajoules,³⁴ which is enough to propel a projectile 50 to 100 nautical miles.³⁵ (Such ranges might refer to using the EMRG for NSFS missions. Intercepts of ASCMs and ASBMs might take place at much shorter ranges.) The Navy began evaluating the two industry-built prototypes in 2012.

In April 2014, the Navy announced that it plans to temporarily install a prototype EMRG aboard a Navy Joint High Speed Vessel (JHSV) in FY2016, for use in at-sea tests.³⁶ **Figure 9** is an artist's rendering of that installation.

In January 2015, it was reported that the Navy is projecting that EMRG could become operational on a Navy ship between 2020 and 2025.³⁷ In April 2015, it was reported that the Navy is considering installing an EMRG on a Zumwalt (DDG-1000) class destroyer by the mid-2020s.³⁸

³⁴ The Navy states that "a megajoule is a measurement of energy associated with a mass traveling at a certain velocity. In simple terms, a one-ton vehicle moving at 100 mph equals a megajoule of energy." (Office of Naval Research Public Affairs, "Navy Sets New World Record with Electromagnetic Railgun Demonstration," *Navy News Service*, December 10, 2010, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=57690.)

³⁵ Grace Jean, "With a Bang, Navy Begins Tests on EM Railgun Prototype Launcher," *Navy News Service*, February 28, 2012, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=65577.

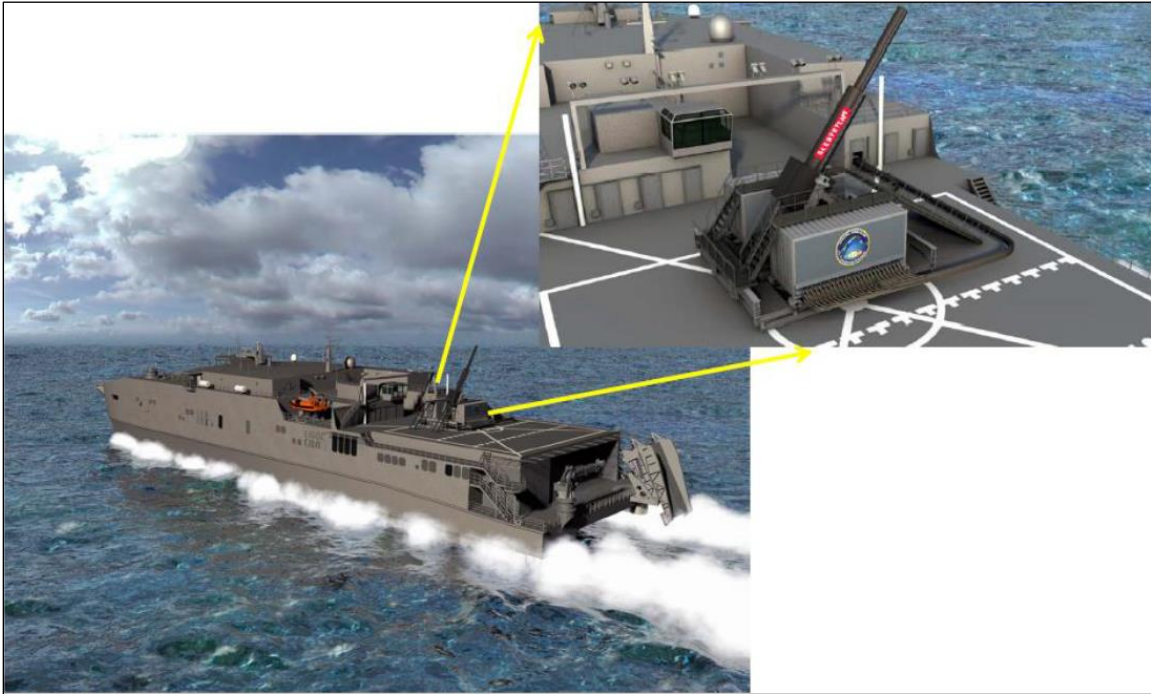
³⁶ Naval Sea Systems Command Office of Corporate Communication, "Navy to Deploy Electromagnetic Railgun Aboard JHSV," *Navy News Service*, April 7, 2014, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=80055.

³⁷ Sam LaGrone, "Navy Wants Rail Guns to Fight Ballistic and Supersonic Missiles Says RFI," *USNI News*, January 5, 2015.

³⁸ Sam LaGrone, "Navy Considering Railgun for Third Zumwalt Destroyer," *USNI News*, February 5, 2015 (updated continued...)

Figure 9. EMRG Prototype Demonstrator Installed on a JHSV

Artist's rendering



Source: Briefing slide entitled “FY16 At-Sea Test of Railgun” in Navy briefing entitled “Railgun Program Overview,” undated but posted at InsideDefense.com on April 14, 2015. (InsideDefense.com states that the briefing was presented at a public conference on April 14, 2015.)

HVP

As the Navy was developing EMRG, it realized that the guided projectile being developed for EMRG could also be fired from 5-inch and 155mm powder guns.³⁹ Navy cruisers each have two

(...continued)

February 11, 2015); Mike McCarthy, “Navy Aiming To Put Railgun On Third Zumwalt Destroyer,” *Defense Daily*, February 6, 2015; Kris Osborn, “Navy Will Test its Electromagnetic Rail Gun aboard DDG 1000,” *DefenseTech*, April 15, 2015. For more on Zumwalt-class destroyers, see CRS Report RL32109, *Navy DDG-51 and DDG-1000 Destroyer Programs: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

³⁹ The Navy describes the HVP as “a next generation, common, low drag, guided projectile capable of completing multiple missions for gun systems such as the Navy 5-Inch, 155-mm, and future railguns.... HVP’s low drag aerodynamic design enables high velocity, maneuverability, and decreased time-to-target. These attributes coupled with accurate guidance electronics provide low cost mission effectiveness against current threats and the ability to adapt to air and surface threats of the future.” (Office of Naval Research, Hypervelocity Projectile,” September 2012, accessed August 14, 2015, at <http://www.onr.navy.mil/~media/Files/Fact-Sheets/35/Hypervelocity-Projectile-2012B.ashx>.) The Navy states that HVP weighs 23 pounds. (Source: David Martin, “Navy’s Newest Weapon Kills at Seven Times the Speed of Sound,” *CBS News* (*cbsnews.com*), April 7, 2014.)

BAE Systems states that HVP is 24 inches long and weighs 28 pounds, including a 15-pound payload. The total length and weight of an HVP launch package, BAE Systems states, is 26 inches and 40 pounds. BAE states that the maximum rate of fire for HVP is 20 rounds per minute from a Mk 45 5-inch gun, 10 rounds per minute from the 155mm gun on DDG-1000 class destroyers (called the Advanced Gun System, or AGS), and 6 rounds per minute from EMRG. HVP’s firing range, BAE Systems states, is more than 40 nautical miles (when fired from a Mk 45 Mod 2 5-inch gun), more than 50 nautical miles (Mk 45 Mod 4 5-inch gun), more than 70 nautical miles (155mm gun on DDG-1000 class destroyers), and more than 100 nautical miles (EMRG). (BAE Systems, “Hypervelocity Projectile (HVP),” 2014, (continued...)

5-inch guns, and most Navy destroyers each have one 5-inch gun. The Navy's three new Zumwalt class (DDG-1000) destroyers, which are under construction, each have two 155mm guns.

The projectile is a hypervelocity projectile when fired from either EMRG or a powder gun, but the term HVP tends to be used more frequently in connection with the concept of firing it from a powder gun. **Figure 10** and **Figure 11** show the HVP.

Figure 10. Photograph Showing HVP



Source: Navy photograph dated April 4, 2014, with a caption that reads: "Rear Adm. Matthew Klunder, chief of naval research, shows off a Hypervelocity Projectile (HVP) to CBS News reporter David Martin during an interview held at the Naval Research Laboratory's materials testing facility. The HVP is a next-generation, common, low drag, guided projectile capable of completing multiple missions for gun systems such as the Navy 5-inch, 155-mm, and future railguns," accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=174517.

(...continued)

accessed August 14, 2015, at http://www.baesystems.com/download/BAES_178505/hyper-velocity-projectile-hvp-datasheet.)

In July 2015, the Navy issued a request for information (RFI) to industry for the fabrication of a prototype EMRG mount capable of handling an integrated launch weight package of 22 kg, or about 48.5 pounds. (RFI for Fabrication of Prototype Mount for Naval Railgun, Solicitation Number: N00024-15-R-4132, FedBizOpps.gov, July 29, 2015. See also Justin Doubleday, "Navy Developing Integrated Mount For Electromagnetic Railgun," *Inside the Navy*, July 31, 2015.)

Figure 11. HVP



Source: Slide 7 from Navy briefing entitled “Electromagnetic Railgun,” NDIA Joint Armaments Forum, Exhibition & Technology Demonstration, May 14, 2014, LCDR Jason Fox, USN, Assistant PM [Program Manager], Railgun Ship Integration, Distribution A, Approved for Public Release, accessed August 13, 2015, at <http://www.dtic.mil/ndia/2014armaments/WedFox.pdf>.

When fired from 5-inch powder guns, the projectile achieves a speed of roughly Mach 3, which is roughly half the speed it achieves when fired from EMRG, but more than twice the speed of a conventional 5-inch shell fired from a 5-inch gun.⁴⁰ This is apparently fast enough for countering at least some ASCMs. The Navy states that “The HVP—combined with the MK 45 [5-inch gun]⁴¹—will support various mission areas including naval surface fire support, and has the capacity to expand to a variety of anti-air threats, [and] anti-surface [missions], and could expand the Navy's engagement options against current and emerging threats.”⁴²

One advantage of the HVP/5-inch gun concept is that the 5-inch guns are already installed on Navy cruisers and destroyers, creating a potential for rapidly proliferating HVP through the cruiser-destroyer force, once development of HVP is complete and the weapon has been

⁴⁰ Source: Sam LaGrone, “Updated: Navy Researching Firing Mach 3 Guided Round from Standard Deck Guns,” *USNI News*, June 1, 2015 (updated June 2, 2015).

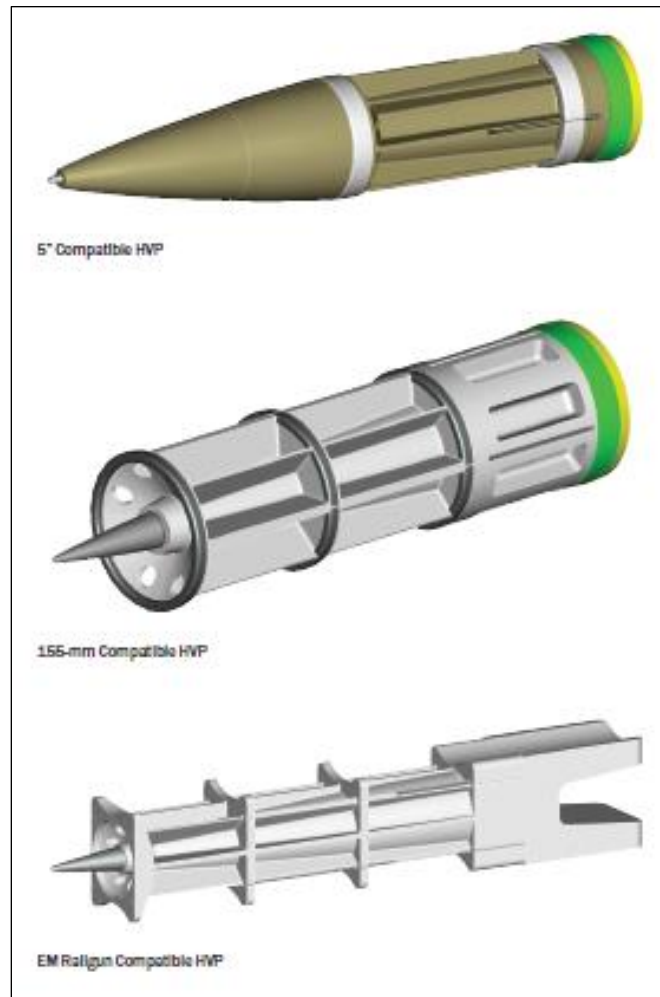
⁴¹ The type of 5-inch gun on Navy cruisers and destroyers is called the Mark 45.

⁴² Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division Corporate Communications, “DEPSECDEF Loads HVP on Test Range, Observes Repetitive Rate Electromagnetic Railgun's Commissioning Series,” *Navy News Service*, May 8, 2015, accessed August 12, 2015, at http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=86987.

integrated into cruiser and destroyer combat systems. **Figure 12** shows HVP launch packages configured for 5-inch guns, 155mm guns, and EMRG.

Figure 12. HVP Launch Packages

Launch packages for 5-inch gun, 155mm gun, and EMRG



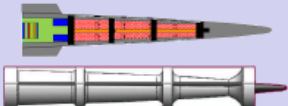
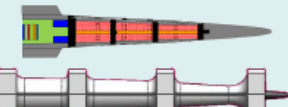
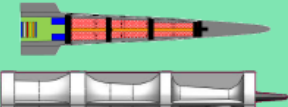
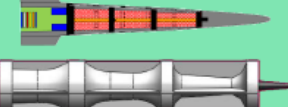


Source: BAE Systems, “Hypervelocity Projectile (HVP),” 2014, accessed August 14, 2015, at http://www.baesystems.com/download/BAES_178505/hyper-velocity-projectile--datasheet.

Figure 13 is a slide showing the potential application of HVP to 5-inch power guns, 155mm powder guns, and EMRG. The first line of the slide, for example, discusses HVP’s use with 5-inch powder guns, stating that it uses a high-explosive (HE) warhead for the NSFS mission;⁴³ that a total of 113 5-inch gun barrels are available in the fleet (which could be a reference to 22 cruisers with two guns each, and 69 destroyers with one gun each); and that as a game-changing capability, it is guided and can be used at ranges of up to 26 nautical miles to 41 nautical miles for NSFS operations, for countering ASCMs, and for anti-surface warfare (ASuW) operations (i.e., attacking surface ships and craft).

⁴³ The “KE” in the next line down means that when fired from EMRG, the projectile can alternatively attack targets using its own kinetic energy (i.e., by simply impacting the target at hypersonic speed).

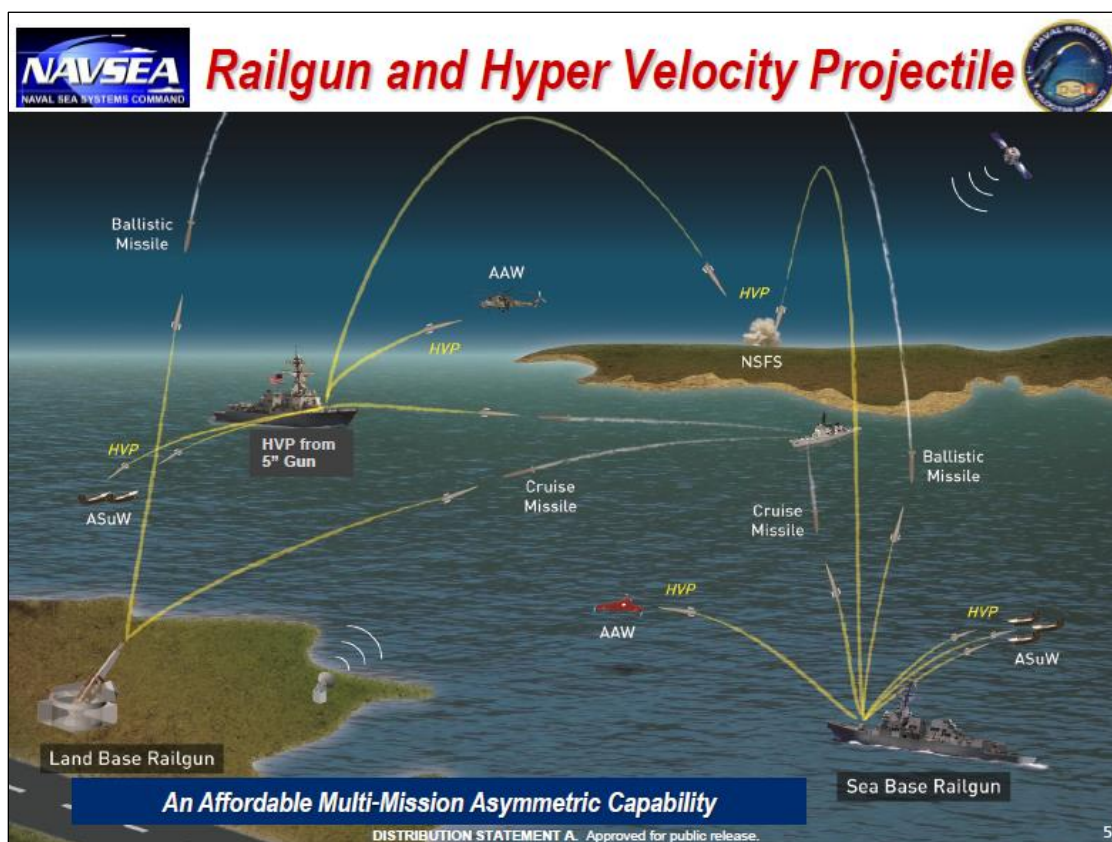
Figure 13. HVP Application to Various Launchers

<div>  <div>Commonality Approach</div>  </div>				
GUN SYSTEM	PROJECTILE (SABOTED & SUB-CALIBER)	MISSION & WARHEAD TYPE	TRANSITION OPPORTUNITES	GAME CHANGING CAPABILITY
5" MK 45 MOD 2/4		NSFS - HE	113 Barrels (PEO IWS)	GUIDED 26 - 41 NM NSFS/ASCM/ASuW
20 - 32 MJ Railgun		NSFS - HE NSFS - KE	FUTURE (PMS405/PEO IWS)	GUIDED 50 - 100 NM NSFS/ASCM/ASuW/ Future Threats
155 mm - AGS		NSFS - HE	6 Barrels (PEO IWS)	GUIDED 40 NM NSFS/ASCM/ASuW
155 mm		Ground Fires - HE	800 ARMY 300 MARINE ASSETS	GUIDED 17 NM Fires/CMD
Multi-Barrel, Multi-Mission, & Multi-Service Applications				

Source: Slide 16 from Navy briefing entitled "Electromagnetic Railgun," NDIA Joint Armaments Forum, Exhibition & Technology Demonstration, May 14, 2014, LCDR Jason Fox, USN, Assistant PM [Program Manager], Railgun Ship Integration, Distribution A, Approved for Public Release, accessed August 13, 2015, at <http://www.dtic.mil/ndia/2014armaments/WedFox.pdf>.

Figure 14 is a not-to-scale illustration of how HVPs fired from EMRGs and 5-inch guns can be used to counter various targets, including ASCMs and ASBMs.

Figure 14. Navy Slide Depicting Operations Against Various Target Types



Source: Slide 5 from Navy briefing entitled “Electromagnetic Railgun,” NDIA Joint Armaments Forum, Exhibition & Technology Demonstration, May 14, 2014, LCDR Jason Fox, USN, Assistant PM [Program Manager], Railgun Ship Integration, Distribution A, Approved for Public Release, accessed August 13, 2015, at <http://www.dtic.mil/ndia/2014armaments/WedFox.pdf>.

Indirectly Improving Ability to Counter ASCMs and ASBMs

As discussed earlier, SSLs currently under development have enough beam power to counter small boats and UAVs, but not enough to ASCMs or ASBMs. Even so, such SSLs could indirectly improve a ship’s ability to counter ASCMs and ASBMs by permitting the ship to use fewer of its SAMs for countering UAVs, and more of them for countering ASCMs and ASBMs. Similarly, even though HVPs fired from 5-inch powder guns would not be able to counter ASBMs, they could indirectly improve a ship’s ability to counter ASBMs by permitting the ship to use fewer of its SAMs for countering ASCMs and more of its SAMs for countering ASBMs.

Remaining Development Challenges

Although the Navy in recent years has made considerable progress in developing SSLs, EMRG, and HVP, a number of significant development challenges remain. Overcoming these challenges will likely require years of additional development work, and ultimate success in overcoming them is not guaranteed.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Laser skeptics sometimes note that laser proponents over the years have made numerous predictions about when (continued...)

SSLs

As shown in **Figure 15**, remaining development challenges for SSLs include, among other things, making the system rugged enough for extended shipboard use, making the beam director (the telescope-like part of the laser that sends the beam toward the target) suitable for use in a marine environment (where moisture and salt in the air can be harsh on equipment), and integrating the system into the ship's electrical power system and combat system.

Figure 15. Development Challenges for SSLs

As of February 2013



Source: Slide from Navy briefing entitled “Navy Solid State Laser Program Overview,” ASNE Day 2013, Mr. Peter “Rollie” Morrison, ONR 35 S&T Program Office, February 22, 2013, accessed August 13, 2015, at https://www.navalengineers.org/ProceedingsDocs/ASNEDay2013/Morrison_Pres.pdf.

(...continued)

lasers might enter service with DOD, and that these predictions repeatedly have not come to pass. Viewing this record of unfulfilled predictions, skeptics might argue that “lasers are X years in the future—and always will be.” Laser proponents acknowledge the record of past unfulfilled predictions, but argue that the situation has now changed because of rapid advancements in SSL technology and a shift from earlier ambitious goals (such as developing megawatt-power lasers for countering targets at tens or hundreds of miles) to more realistic goals (such as developing kilowatt-power lasers for countering targets at no more than a few miles). Laser proponents might argue that laser skeptics are vulnerable to what might be called cold plate syndrome (i.e., a cat that sits on a hot plate will not sit on a hot plate again—but it will not sit on a cold plate, either).

A January 23, 2015, blog post co-authored by the Office of Naval Research's program officer for the Navy's SSL program states:

In the near term, many challenges remain to develop and operate high-energy laser systems in the maritime environment that are unique to the Navy and Marine Corps. Among these challenges is dealing with the heat generated as power levels increase. A second issue is packing sufficient power on the platform, which will require advanced battery, generator, power conditioning, and hybrid energy technologies. Current laser technologies are approximately 30 percent electrically efficient. Corrosion and contamination of optical windows by shipboard salt spray, dirt, and grime also are technical challenges. In addition, atmospheric turbulence resulting from shifting weather conditions, moisture, and dust is problematic. Turbulence can cause the air over long distances to act like a lens, resulting in the laser beam's diffusing and distorting, which degrades its performance.

Much progress has been made in demonstrating high-energy laser weapon systems in the maritime environment, but there is still much to be done. Additional advances will be required to scale power levels to the hundreds of kilowatts that will make high[-]energy lasers systems robust, reliable, and affordable. Higher power levels are important for the ability to engage more challenging threats and improve the rate and range at which targets can be engaged.

The programs managed by ONR are addressing these remaining issues while positioning this important warfighting capability toward an acquisition program and eventual deployment with the fleet and force.⁴⁵

EMRG and HVP

As shown in **Figure 16**, remaining development challenges for EMRG involve items relating to the gun itself (including increasing barrel life to desired levels), the projectile, the weapon's electrical power system, and the weapon's integration with the ship. Fielding HVP on cruisers and destroyers ships equipped with 5-inch and 155mm powder guns would additionally require HVP to be integrated with the combat systems of those ships.

⁴⁵ Peter Morrison and Dennis Sorenson, "Developing a High-Energy Laser for the Navy," *Future Force*, January 23, 2015, accessed August 13, 2015, at <http://futureforce.navylive.dodlive.mil/2015/01/high-energy-laser/>. The authors are identified at the end of the post as follows: "Peter Morrison is the Office of Naval Research's program officer for the Navy's Solid-State Laser program. Dennis Sorenson is a contractor with the Office of Naval Research."

Figure 16. Development Challenges for EMRG

As of May 2014



Source: Slide 9 from Navy briefing entitled “Electromagnetic Railgun,” NDIA Joint Armaments Forum, Exhibition & Technology Demonstration, May 14, 2014, LCDR Jason Fox, USN, Assistant PM [Program Manager], Railgun Ship Integration, Distribution A, Approved for Public Release, accessed August 13, 2015, at <http://www.dtic.mil/ndia/2014armaments/WedFox.pdf>.

The Navy states:

The EMRG effort began in FY 2005 with a focus on the barrel, power storage, and rail technology. In 2015, the Navy is testing full-scale industry advanced composite launchers for structure strength and manufacturability, and has advanced the pulsed-power system design from single-shot to actively cooled repeated rate operations. Building on the success of the first phase, the second phase started in 2012 with a focus on developing equipment and techniques to fire ten rounds per minute. Thermal-management techniques required for sustained firing rates are in development for both the launcher system and the pulsed-power system. The Office of Naval Research will develop a tactical prototype EMRG launcher and pulsed-power architecture suitable for advanced testing both afloat and ashore. Railgun demonstration has been funded to occur in FY 2016.⁴⁶

A June 2015 press report states:

As the Navy prepares to test its electromagnetic railgun at sea for the first time in 2016, service leaders said one of the biggest challenges will be integrating the new technology onto existing platforms.....

⁴⁶ U.S. Navy, *U.S. Navy Program Guide 2015*, p. 169.

[Vice Adm. William Hilarides, commander of Naval Sea Systems Command] said he is positive the Navy will successfully demonstrate the weapon's ability to fire from the Trenton, but one of the biggest challenges will be configuring the railgun so that it fits within the power structure of other existing platforms.

"Those are not 600-ton margin ships," he said [meaning ships with 600 tons of growth margin available to accommodate EMRG]. "If they have 60 tons, if they have 16 tons, then we'll be talking about what do we take off our existing destroyers, cruisers and other ships in order to get this incredible capability [on them]."

These types of discussions are influencing ship designs as program managers look at what systems are indispensable and what can be exchanged, Hilarides said.

Integrating the railgun into the fleet won't be a swift process.

It will be at least 10 years until the railgun is fielded on new ships and potentially 30 years past that before the Navy considers removing powder guns from the fleet entirely and transitioning to energy weapons alone, according to Hilarides.⁴⁷

Issues for Congress

Potential Oversight Questions

Potential oversight questions for Congress regarding Navy programs for SSLs, EMRG, and HVP include the following:

- Using currently available approaches for countering ASCMs and ASBMs, how well could Navy surface ships defend themselves in a combat scenario against an adversary such as China that has large numbers of ASCMs (including advanced models) and ASBMs? How would this change if Navy surface ships in coming years were equipped with SSLs, EMRG, HVP, or some combination of these systems?
- How significant are the remaining development challenges for SSLs, EMRG, and HVP?
- Are current schedules for developing SSLs, EMRG, and HVP appropriate in relation to remaining development challenges and projected improvements in enemy ASCMs and ASBMs? To what degree are current schedules for developing SSLs, EMRG, or HVP sensitive to annual funding levels?
- When does the Navy anticipate issuing roadmaps detailing its plans for procuring and installing production versions of SSLs, EMRGs, and HVP on specific Navy ships by specific dates?
- Will the kinds of surface ships that the Navy plans to procure in coming years have sufficient space, weight, electrical power, and cooling capability to take full advantage of SSLs (particularly those with beam powers above 200 kW) and EMRG? What changes, if any, would need to be made in Navy plans for procuring large surface combatants (i.e., destroyers and cruisers) or other Navy ships to take full advantage of SSLs and EMRG?

⁴⁷ Allyson Versprille, "Integration Biggest Challenge for Railgun," *National Defense*, June 2015. See also Lance M. Bacon, "3-Star: 'Lot of Work' Before Railgun Arrives in Fleet," *Navy Times*, February 5, 2015.

- Are the funding sources for SSLs, EMRG, and HVP in Navy and Defense-Wide research and development accounts (see “Summary of Congressional Action on FY2017 Funding” below) sufficiently visible for supporting congressional oversight?

Legislative Activity for FY2017

Summary of Congressional Action on FY2017 Funding

Funding in the defense budget for research and development work on Navy SSLs, EMRG, and HVP is spread across several research and development account line items (which are known as program elements, or PEs). The PEs shown in **Table 1** capture much but not necessarily all of the funding for developing Navy SSLs, EMRG, and HVP. The PEs shown in the table, moreover, include funding for efforts other than Navy SSLs, EMRG, and HVP, so congressional changes from requested amounts might or might not relate to SSLs, EMRG, or HVP.

Table 1. Summary of Congressional Action on FY17 Funding

In millions of dollars, rounded to nearest tenth

Program Element (PE) number, PE name, FY16 budget line number	Req.	Authorization			Appropriation		
		HASC	SASC	Conf.	HAC	SAC	Conf.
0602114N , Power Projection Applied Research, line 4	41.4						
0602750N , Future Naval Capabilities Applied Research, line 13	165.1						
0603114N , Power Projection Advanced Technology, line 16	96.4						
0603673N , Future Naval Capabilities Advanced Technology Development, line 21	249.1						
0603925N , Directed Energy and Electric Weapon System, line 75	32.7						
0604250D8Z , Advanced Innovative Technology, line 95	844.9						

Source: Table prepared by CRS based on Navy FY17 budget submission and committee and conference reports.

Notes: **HASC** is House Armed Services Committee; **SASC** is Senate Armed Services Committee; **HAC** is House Appropriations Committee; **SAC** is Senate Appropriations Committee; **Conf.** is conference agreement. The PEs shown in the table below capture much but not necessarily all of the funding for work on Navy SSLs, EMRG, and HVP. The PEs shown in the table, moreover, include funding for efforts other than Navy SSLs, EMRG, and HVP.

Appendix. Potential Advantages and Limitations of Shipboard Lasers

This appendix presents additional information on potential advantages and limitations of shipboard lasers.

Potential Advantages

In addition to a low marginal cost per shot and deep magazine, potential advantages of shipboard lasers include the following:

- **Fast engagement times.** Light from a laser beam can reach a target almost instantly (eliminating the need to calculate an intercept course, as there is with interceptor missiles) and, by remaining focused on a particular spot on the target, cause disabling damage to the target within seconds. After disabling one target, a laser can be redirected in several seconds to another target.
- **Ability to counter radically maneuvering missiles.** Lasers can follow and maintain their beam on radically maneuvering missiles that might stress the maneuvering capabilities of Navy SAMs.
- **Precision engagements.** Lasers are precision-engagement weapons—the light spot from a laser, which might be several inches in diameter, affects what it hits, while generally not affecting (at least not directly) separate nearby objects.
- **Graduated responses.** Lasers can perform functions other than destroying targets, including detecting and monitoring targets and producing nonlethal effects, including reversible jamming of electro-optic (EO) sensors. Lasers offer the potential for graduated responses that range from warning targets to reversibly jamming their systems, to causing limited but not disabling damage (as a further warning), and then finally causing disabling damage.

Potential Limitations

Potential limitations of shipboard lasers include the following:

- **Line of sight.** Since laser light tends to fly through the atmosphere on an essentially straight path, shipboard lasers would be limited to line-of-sight engagements, and consequently could not counter over-the-horizon targets or targets that are obscured by intervening objects. This limits in particular potential engagement ranges against small boats, which can be obscured by higher waves, or low-flying targets. Even so, lasers can rapidly reacquire boats obscured by periodic swells.
- **Atmospheric absorption, scattering, and turbulence.** Substances in the atmosphere—particularly water vapor, but also things such as sand, dust, salt particles, smoke, and other air pollution—absorb and scatter light from a shipboard laser, and atmospheric turbulence can defocus a laser beam. These effects can reduce the effective range of a laser. Absorption by water vapor is a particular consideration for shipboard lasers because marine environments feature substantial amounts of water vapor in the air. There are certain wavelengths of light (i.e., “sweet spots” in the electromagnetic spectrum) where atmospheric absorption by water vapor is markedly reduced. Lasers can be

designed to emit light at or near those sweet spots, so as to maximize their potential effectiveness. Absorption generally grows with distance to target, making it in general less of a potential problem for short-range operations than for longer-range operations. Adaptive optics, which make rapid, fine adjustments to a laser beam on a continuous basis in response to observed turbulence, can counteract the effects of atmospheric turbulence. Even so, lasers might not work well, or at all, in rain or fog, preventing lasers from being an all-weather solution.

- **Thermal blooming.** A laser that continues firing in the same exact direction for a certain amount of time can heat up the air it is passing through, which in turn can defocus the laser beam, reducing its ability to disable the intended target. This effect, called thermal blooming, can make lasers less effective for countering targets that are coming straight at the ship, on a constant bearing (i.e., “down-the-throat” shots). Other ship self-defense systems, such as interceptor missiles or a CIWS, might be more suitable for countering such targets. Most tests of laser systems have been against crossing targets rather than “down-the-throat” shots. In general, thermal blooming becomes more of a concern as the power of the laser beam increases.
- **Saturation attacks.** Since a laser can attack only one target at a time, requires several seconds to disable it, and several more seconds to be redirected to the next target, a laser can disable only so many targets within a given period of time. This places an upper limit on the ability of an individual laser to deal with saturation attacks—attacks by multiple weapons that approach the ship simultaneously or within a few seconds of one another. This limitation can be mitigated by installing more than one laser on the ship, similar to how the Navy installs multiple CIWS systems on certain ships.
- **Hardened targets and countermeasures.** Less-powerful lasers—that is, lasers with beam powers measured in kilowatts (kW) rather than megawatts (MW)—can have less effectiveness against targets that incorporate shielding, ablative material, or highly reflective surfaces, or that rotate rapidly (so that the laser spot does not remain continuously on a single location on the target’s surface) or tumble. Small boats could employ smoke or other obscurants to reduce their susceptibility to laser attack. Measures such as these, however, can increase the cost and/or weight of a weapon, and obscurants could make it more difficult for small boat operators to see what is around them, reducing their ability to use their boats effectively.
- **Risk of collateral damage to aircraft, satellites, and human eyesight.** Since light from an upward-pointing laser that does not hit the target would continue flying upward in a straight line, it could pose a risk of causing unwanted collateral damage to aircraft and satellites. The light emitted by SSLs being developed by the Navy is of a frequency that can cause permanent damage to human eyesight, including blinding. Blinding can occur at ranges much greater than ranges for damaging targeted objects. Scattering of laser light off the target or off fog or particulates in the air can pose a risk to exposed eyes.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The United States in 1995 ratified the 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restriction on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. An international review of the convention began in 1994 and concluded in May 1996 with the adoption of, among other things, a new Protocol IV on blinding laser weapons. The protocol prohibits the employment of lasers that are (continued...)

For additional background information on potential Navy shipboard SSLs, see CRS Report R41526, *Navy Shipboard Lasers for Surface, Air, and Missile Defense: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

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specifically designed to cause permanent blindness to the naked eye or to the eye with corrective eyesight devices. The United States ratified Protocol IV on December 23, 2008, and it entered into force for the United States on July 21, 2009. DOD views the protocol as fully consistent with DOD policy. DOD believes the lasers discussed in this report are consistent with DOD policy of prohibiting the use of lasers specifically designed to cause permanent blindness to the naked eye or to the eye with corrective eyesight devices. For further discussion, see Appendix I ("Protocol on Blinding Lasers") in CRS Report R41526, *Navy Shipboard Lasers for Surface, Air, and Missile Defense: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.